584 The influence of elders is decisive with regard to marriage; the parents or their deputees take part in many customs pertaining to court-

ship and their choice is practically binding for their children--sons and

[163] daughters alike. The number of children per family averaged 3.87 among the peasants between the two world wars, with a tendency to a slight decrease ever since.

596 In the patriarchal family structure of the Magyar peasantry, the influence of elders is, in most aspects of social life, decisive. Not only does the child grow up and is taught in the family, but, in many cases, he continues to live together with his parents under their benevolent but authoritarian rule. The sometimes excessive conservatism of the Magyar peasant has its roots in his everyday life in the family. The regimented family life, moreover, imbues him with a keen sense of duty and discipline.

The importance of the influence exerted by the peasant family upon

[867] the individual is obvious. The family not only shapes the moral individual more than any formal education in the city, but also determines, to a considerable extent, his attitude toward the actual regime. The peasant's religion, his way of life, and his techniques of production are now being attacked by multifarious governmental forces propagating rationalism, industrialization, and collectivization. Against this propaganda, the family life teaches Christianity, love of the soil, and especially the love of one's own land.

with poems and tunes. What is most vital on this day is thus summarized in a Transdanubian fragment: 527

The mahaleb cherry is ripe,
Its twigs are very bent,
There is a young woman amidst its leaves,
Hug the one you love best.
I hug and kiss this one
On Saint Ivan's hill, on its summit,
God shall give us a slow rain
Wash these two together,
Like two golden twigs.

# The Matyó Wedding

It is a pious belief that marriages are made in Heaven. 581
As we are told to believe this, let us do so; we shall have 101
time to see with our own eyes when we enter the realm of eternal light . . . The Matyó tribe are very religious and are a group of the Hungarian people who live according to a very severe moral code. (The inhabitants of the County of Borsod, who live in the villages of *Mezőkövesd*, *Tard* and *Szentistván*, all close to the town of Miskolc, are called Matyó people.) They believe that marriages are made in Heaven, but not in the sense in which novelists in general are wont to think, namely that a mysterious force, Love, draws the couple to each other. There is no question of this. Amongst the Matyós a love match is a rara avis indeed, of course the Matyós fall in love like everyone else: the earthly bonds of marriage however are spun not by love, but by their parents.

The Matyó lad, like any other, can visit the lady of 584
his heart, whereever she may happen to live — every single evening if he choses to do so — but a wife approved by

584 his parents he can only seek in his own street. The street is populated by his closest relations and kinsmen; so 582 marriage is limited to the strictest endogamy: every one may seek his or her «happiness» only in their tribe or clan . . .

That the visits of the infatuated Matyó lad should overstep the very strict moral limits imposed by custom is practically an unknown occurrence . . .

Becoming acquainted is extremely easy. In the evening the lads, alone or in a group, may enter any house where there is an unmarried girl, whether the people known him or not. When he goes in, he does not say his name, nor does he ask that of the girl. But before he enters the house, he knocks at the window and says: — «I wish you a very good evening!» — The mother's answer to this is: — «The same to you!» — Then the youth says: — «Your daughter shall give me a match!» — The girl then comes into the dark courtyard without a word and strikes the match. The lad lights his cigarette or pipe from it, asking the girl: — «How are you beautiful girl, I hope you are not engaged yet?» — That is merely a traditional question, as if the girl were already engaged, the mother would have warned him by thus answering his knock on the window: «The match has already been struck!»

On an evening each lad visits eight to ten houses where there are unmarried girls. The girl accompanies each lad into the courtyard, but she cannot stay long out with him, as one of those left behind in the room soon shouts after her: — «Listen, I haven't come to visit your mother!» — Thus the lad makes his little round every night; of course only after all the outdoor work has been finished, that is from the autumn to the spring. — Next morning the parents crossexamine the lad and he confesses whatever he likes . . . His secretiveness is of little avail to him, as his parents tell him very categorically whom

584 he may visit with «serious» intentions. Whether he likes her or not, — he may marry only that girl whom his parents like! If the boy disapproves of his parents' taste he can declare that he will not marry just yet, thereby merely expressing the hope that perhaps in the meantime the girl in question will be tied to some other person with the «heavenly» bonds...

[581] Beauty does not count, the financial situation alone is of any importance. If the girl is ugly, which is fairly rare amongst the good looking Matyós, there is the standing formula of consolation: — «Look at her my son, she has a great patch on her skirt!» — The great patch means a great strip of land...

When the boy has been persuaded and has given in, a woman is sent to the girl's family as an emissary to take soundings... If the thing is all right, the boy presents himself in the evening. — «Well, did you think of something?» — he asks the girl in the courtyard. — «My mother knows all about it», — is her answer. — «Well, godmother, will you let your daughter marry me?» — is [576] the question he asks the mother: as Matyó lads call every woman «godmother», whether they know her or not, unless she is a relation or a neighbour.

[592] The girl gives her young man an «engagement apron». Its colour is black and its bottom is embroidered with glorious bright embroidery: it is a masterpiece of Hungarian art! Otherwise it is forbidden to show affection either then, or during the whole time of marriage: in Matyó eyes that is a great disgrace even in the fortunate case where the young people actually happen to be in love with each other. The betrothed also gets a shirt, another masterpiece of the Matyó art of embroidering; done with red and blue threads. On an agreed date the young man is dressed in his engagement shirt and apron. About mid-

584 night he slinks home, so that if possible no one shall see him. To be seen would also be a disgrace. He gets two plates as well, on one there is a fattened duck, a stuffed chicken, a tart, cigarettes, apples, nuts and gingerbread; on the other old fashioned sweets. The lad carries the apron, a relation of the girl's the plates. On top of all this the lad also gets 40 to 50 pengő: that is the «apron money». He even gets a rosemary covered with gold dust as a bridegroom's bouquet. This usually happens on a Saturday. Next day he goes to church in his new apron and with the bridegroom's bouquet in his hat. Everyone can see what he is up to... Yet he will not even tell the name of his fiancée, in vain do his friends bombard him with questions... He does not even glance at his bride... Even that would be a disgrace... But in the afternoon he has a bachelor party, paying for the drinks with the «apron money» and in the evening the newly fledged bridegroom takes his bachelor friends to see his fiancée; and she offers the guests apples and nuts.

585 The engagement lasts one or two months. In olden times the wedding lasted about three weeks, now-a-days it is all over in a day. The whole «lot», that is to say the whole clan, is invited to the wedding. Three carts usually take the bride's trousseau; if she is poor, one cart is sufficient. A well to-do girl gets besides the furniture 18 pillows, nine with linen and nine with silk covers, three mattresses, one eider down, five richly embroidered sheets, three bed covers, thirty shirts, twenty-seven «testalló»-s (peculiar kind of blouses), 12 silk kerchiefs, 12 scarves, 18 skirts, 9 ordinary and 7 grand aprons, 4 frilled petticoats, 15 warm scarves and one dress for baking bread. This is her due from her parents. In old times she got from her fiancé a pair of red boots, now she gets a pair of shoes instead, a silken kerchief and a wedding

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581 the joy which the two clans of the newly wedded couple feel and through which they share in the satisfaction which the union of two of their own means both to the race and to themselves.

581 584 According to a wise old Hungarian saying, youth should marry, but the selection of a mate should take place not only through the eye, but also through the ear. That is to say, not desire and passion alone, but reason also should decide the choice. Love is a natural thing and a fine one, but parents know that while marriages are no doubt made in Heaven, they are none the less lived down here upon the earth. It is youth's privilege to love, but it is the privilege and duty of age to help to make a wise choice; and so it is done. The reasons for and against are carefully weighed, and the young folk, trusting the wisdom of the old, bend their fate to their elders' decision. If love is there also, all the better... There are as many marriage customs in Hungary as there are villages, the order and symbolism of which is the outcome of reason, experience, and, in many cases, force of time-honoured tradition.

Hungarian marriage is endogamic. Its motto is "same village, same section, same street", which really means that Hungarian custom favours the marriage of young people of the same religion and of the same general standing. This is in part responsible for the fact that in spite of the substantial admixture of foreign nationalities, the Hungarian population of whole regions has definitely descended from early Hungarian settlers, and it is also an illuminating example that the hierarchy of social classes is not unknown to peasantry itself.

584 Normally the choice of the daughter-in-law is the privilege of the boy's parents, after due consideration and the comparison of possibilities in which they often make

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use of the services of "recommending women", known 584
to the less respectful as "gossip-bags". Once their choice has been made they impart it to their son, and the first step in a long, ceremonious proceeding is now his. Before his first visit, however, an envoy of the family, usually an elderly aunt, calls at the girl's house to make sure about the other party's willingness. This first enquiry, like all the ensuing steps, is done with little, symbolic acts shrouded with an air of mysterious secrecy. If the findings of the envoy are promising, the boy will make his first call. Often he does that in the guise of a farm-hand looking for work, a farmer looking for hay for his cattle, or some similar device. In one region he knocks at the door and asks for a light for his pipe. The light is usually offered, but if the mother instead of the daughter opens the door and her answer is that the light has gone out, that means that they have decided otherwise. If the boy is accepted favourably his flask will be refilled before his departure, but if his coat is placed before the door that means that they did not like him and that he has symbolically but definitely been shown out of the house... If the boy and his family have not previously known the girl who has been proposed to them, the whole family of the boy participates in the first visit, which is called the "inspection of the daughter". If their liking is mutual, the ceremony of asking in marriage follows in a few days. The boy and his best man call at the girl's house, and in the course of a pre-arranged meal, which has, however, the appearance of a casual event, they make their intentions known. The acceptance, which is given in the same fashion, is only conditional, and the final outcome depends on the results of a return visit of the girl and her family to the boy's house. This is known as the "inspection of the housefire".

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584 The thorough inspection of house and farm is followed by a meal which is meant to give an occasion to the girl and her parents to express their opinion. If they accept a meal and the girl partakes of it, then they are pleased with their visit; but if they do not eat, or if the girl does not touch food and drink, that means that they have come to the conclusion that the boy's house, farm, or family is not considered a setting good enough for them.

583 It is significant that the Hungarian word for the bridegroom, *vőlegény*, literally means "buying man", and that for a marriageable girl, *eladó lány*, "girl for sale". The survival of these names is more than a mere relic, and the formal engagement is today, as always in the past, preceded by the colourful scene of the ancient "buying-selling" agreement. This agreement, which might be oral or written, defines the "buying-price" and stipulates the rights of the future wife, among others the so-called widow rights, that is, her title to board and lodging in case she survives her husband or if there is no issue of the marriage. The price of the girl is nowadays money and clothes, the amount of which depend on local custom, the financial standing of the boy, and the importance and the desirability of the girl's family. The girl's dowry, which usually balances her "selling-price", consists of a chest of clothes, linen and bedding, all of which together is called the girl's "bed". The deliberations, every phase of which is strictly fixed by custom, take place in dead earnest, and only when every point is duly settled do the parties sit down to the festive meal prepared for the occasion. On the evening following the buying-agreement, the boy and his best man call again to go through the ceremony of formal engagement, which is known as the "handshake", because that is the form it takes between